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## THE CHARACTERS IN VICTOR HUGO'S "HERNANI"

### SECOND PAPER<sup>1</sup>

Don Ruy Gomez, the principal antagonist or opposing force in Victor Hugo's "Hernani," is, like the hero, a complex individual man, having contradictory qualities. He is represented in the drama as a man of varied experience and of numerous characteristics. He is proud, bombastic, loquacious, inquisitive, impulsive, melancholy, jealous, revengeful, inexorable, avid of honor, lover-like, sympathetic, courteous, loyal, given to hospitality, and possessed of a high sense of honor. We are also informed as to his age, physical qualities, political position, and social standing. He is more than sixty years old, and has not enough hair on his head to fill the hand of the executioner. Though old and rich, he would give all he has for youth, if only to be a shepherd of the fields. Though his body is withered and head bowed, his soul is young, for there are never, he declares, any wrinkles in the heart, which is always young and can always bleed. He is count and grandee of the Castle of Figuerè, high counsellor of Aragon, and Duke of Pastraña. The old duke is proud of his old ancestral name of Silva, on which there is no stain. He is the uncle and betrothed of Doña Sol, who lives with him in his castle. This feeble and venerable old man is rich and lives in a patriarchal state far from the court. Princes and pilgrims visit his castle, seek his counsel, obtain his sympathy, and enjoy his splendid hospitality.

The character of the old duke is striking and subtle. At times it appears more lyric or epic than dramatic. It represents an older heroism, when men were possessed of honor and loyalty. It evokes the good old times of the great old men before the decadence of youth. It recalls the heroic manners and virtues of the Cornelian heroes. The old knight is proud of his ancestors who honored old men, protected girls, and were never guilty of treachery. His artificial pride, as seen in the famous portrait scene, recalls the lofty Spanish family pride exhibited by the

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<sup>1</sup>See former article on "The Character of Victor Hugo's *Hernani*" in *THE SEWANEE REVIEW*, April 1905, pp. 209-215.

Prince of Aragon, in "The Merchant of Venice," who, in choosing his casket, said:

I will not jump with common spirits,  
And rank me with the barbarous multitudes.

As long, however, as Gomez makes love or any other passion yield to his feudal pride, we feel that he is great and deserving of our sympathy.

The old duke is in love with Doña Sol, his niece, who does not return his love. The melancholy love of the rejected old lord is touching. His love is not ludicrous, it is a weakness. While the love of the old man is lyrical and rhetorical, at the same time it is natural and appropriate, for Gomez loves not like a young man but as an old man. He says that one is not master of one's self when one is old and in love. While he would give all he possesses for youth, yet he maintains that his love is not changeable like that of frivolous young men. His love is not like some fragile toy; it is severe, deep, sure, paternal, friendly, solid as the oak of his ducal chair. Characteristically and pathetically he tells Doña Sol that it would be a sacred work for her, a young girl, to care for him, an old man, that she would be to him an angel with a woman's heart. With lyric fervor he declares that he loves her as one loves the aurora, or the flowers, or the skies, and that to see her every day would be to him a perpetual feast. Such love as this, then, does not provoke our laughter, but rather excites our pity, and in that it is truly tragic.

Don Ruy Gomez has also said that when one is old and in love, one is jealous. At first his jealousy is the touching jealousy of the discarded old lover, but when he learns that the king is his rival in love, his jealousy turns to hate and a desire for revenge. His passion then becomes epic, for there is no longer any struggle represented. He is first all love, then all hate. As soon as Gomez learns that Doña Sol has been carried off by his royal rival, his hatred becomes furious, and from that time on he thinks only of hate and revenge. He pursues the king until Carlos surrenders Doña Sol to Hernani, and then he relentlessly pursues the bandit until Hernani is dead. As with Shylock money was nothing in comparison with revenge, so with the old duke the

desire for vengeance is stronger than his sense of honor. As the infamous Templar, Brian de Bois-Guilbert, declared to Rebecca that he had broken many a law and many a commandment, but his word never, so Gomez lays fantastic stress upon one virtue at the expense of another, as when honor in the climax is made to yield to vengeance in the catastrophe. The old feudal lord wants the privilege of striking the fatal blow at the king, for nothing is sweeter to his eyes than to see one's enemies brought low. Like one of the characters of Euripides, he regards revenge as the fairest prize the gods can bestow upon mankind.

As soon as Gomez determines on revenge, he becomes terrible and inflexible, and his doings become mysterious. He adopts the mask of a black domino, in which he presents a spectre-like figure, whose step is like the step of the dead, whose eyes flash forth flames, whose journey is, as he himself confesses, not from hell but to hell, and whose voice is sepulchral. He becomes a sort of dark figure of destiny hovering in the background. In the final scene he becomes inexorable, exulting like a fiend over his victim, no touching appeals for mercy being able to move him in his determination not to yield. He forgets, until overtaken by remorse, that

Revenge, at first though sweet,  
Bitter ere long back on itself recoils.

Were the old duke not hedged about by certain redeeming qualities, his intense, passionate hatred and his Promethean inexorableness would make him a monster, a caricature. Gomez is not only jealous and revengeful, he is also courteous, loyal, given to hospitality, and possessed of a high sense of honor. The courtesy of the proud and dignified duke is seen when he recognizes that the king is one of the two young men he finds in the room of Doña Sol. Though appearances are against Carlos, Gomez, like a courtly gentleman of the old school, accepts the king's doubtful explanation of his unexpected visit and promptly begs his pardon. In the portrait-scene he declares that the family of Silva has always been loyal. To him the rites of hospitality are sacred and inviolable, and he declares he would protect his guest even against the king. He entertains the king and welcomes

the pilgrim as his guest. Though the pilgrim-bandit has betrayed his host by making love to Doña Sol, who is supposed to be making preparation for her immediate marriage to her uncle, yet Gomez proves the sincerity of his former declaration in regard to the protection of his guest, by heroically offering to surrender his own head rather than that of his ungrateful guest. A little later his sense of honor is severely tested by the king's threat to carry off Doña Sol as a hostage. In melodramatic fashion his Castilian honor wins when he declares to the king, "Take her and leave me honor." Finally, however, in the catastrophe, as has been indicated above, honor yields to revenge. Like Shylock, he holds his victim to his bond, and falls.

While Hernani and Gomez are truly tragic characters, the former meeting his tragic fate on account of an error of judgment, and the latter through a crime, the young king, Don Carlos, is portrayed as a comic character, passing from good to better, and as an imperfect character, passing from vice to goodness. The story of his life may be represented as an inclined plane, ending in complete security. His life, too, presents an antithesis — the profligate young king becoming the merciful mature emperor. He is also an individual with a definite history, experience, and character. His grandfather was a magnificent and powerful emperor. His father was German and his mother Spanish. He is himself first king, then emperor. As king he is licentious, involved in various intrigues, surrounded by courtiers who profit by his distractions, and is engaged in a struggle with the bandits. He knows Latin imperfectly, possesses a vein of sardonic humor, indulges in swift repartees, carries on his intrigues in disguise, refuses to fight a duel with an inferior, pursues Hernani himself, declares himself to be madly in love with the beautiful black eyes of Doña Sol whom he tries to carry off by force, and is ambitious to become emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. After his election as emperor, he accepts his new responsibilities seriously, changes his course of life, sacrifices love to duty and magnanimously pardons Hernani, to whom he restores Doña Sol together with his titles and property.

Nearly all the comic element of the drama is furnished by Carlos and his courtiers. The witty and sarcastic repartees of

Carlos, which recall those of Euripides and Shakespeare, are usually clever. Through nearly all of his short speeches, in which he has the opportunity of displaying his skill in rapid repartee, there runs a vein of sardonic humor. His jests with his crumb-seeking courtiers and with the duenna Doña Josefa, and his tendency to become humorous in a striking situation, are, however, often more grotesque than comic. For example, his first conversation with the servant, whom he forbids to say two words and who therefore says only one, is so grotesque that the duenna significantly asks Carlos if he is not the devil himself. Again, he calls the closet, in which he had sought a hiding-place, a stable for broom-stick horses. On coming out from this closet, Hernani asks him what he was doing in there. To this the young king jocosely replies that apparently he was not riding through a forest. In the first balcony-scene when Doña Sol snatches his dagger and threatens to stab him, the undaunted Carlos coolly remarks that it is no wonder she loves a rebel. Just after he hears the signal announcing his election as emperor, he overhears the conspirators planning to take his life; with apparent unconcern he asks them to move on, for the emperor hears them. Immediately the lights go out and the emperor, advancing towards the conspirators, calls them dumb statues whose torches his breath has extinguished.

The youthful king is further exhibited as a frivolous libertine, whose love is not really serious but is a distraction. We are allowed to catch glimpses of his storm-and-stress period, in which the young sensualist sows his wild oats. He enters into the fun and frolic of the time. Like the dissolute Francis I, who is represented in Hugo's *Le Roi s'Amuse* as meeting in disguise plebeian girls at night and on Sundays, the licentious Carlos carries on his nefarious schemes in disguise. At one time he is pursued by the enraged husband of Mme. Giron, and at another time by Hernani, against whose sweetheart the crafty king is planning an infamous seizure. Like Franz Moor, the youthful Carlos is a materialist, a sensualist, the very antithesis of Hernani, who dreams of a spiritual union with his lover. Yet the vicious character of Carlos is allowable in dramatic art, since what is reprehensible in the king is finally adjusted in the emperor.

In the progress of the drama Don Carlos is presented to us not only as a humorous king jesting with his courtiers, not only as a frivolous young monarch engaged in schemes of base intrigues, but also as a magnanimous emperor transformed by a worthy ambition and by the contemplation of new and weighty responsibilities. This violent contrast, characteristic of Hugo, is so skillfully managed that we are not shocked by its representation. It is an admirable picture of the rise of an individual, of the development and revolution of a character. As Hernani is one man as long as he is a bandit, and becomes another as soon as he is pardoned and restored to his former estate, and as Gomez is one man until the desire for revenge takes possession of him, so Don Carlos is one man until he is elected emperor, when his transformation becomes complete. In the famous monologue of the fourth act Carlos is seen experiencing a great Cornelian struggle between love and duty, in which the latter triumphantly wins. The transformation is not so much in the nature of a miraculous conversion as it is a natural transition, like that of Shakespeare's Henry V, from youth to manhood, from a period of thoughtless and frivolous life to a riper, richer, fuller work of maturity. Urged by the weight of a great duty, impressed by the higher responsibilities suddenly thrust upon him, and influenced by the presence of the very spirit of his great predecessor, his soul is stirred to its profoundest depths, his better nature triumphs, he puts away childish things, and becomes a new man. While under the inspiration of this change, he decides to give the world a lesson in clemency, just taught him by the spirit of Charlemagne. He therefore pardons the bandits, generously restoring to the leader his sweetheart and his castle. By pardoning Hernani we see his clemency, and by his failure to pardon Gomez we see his impartial justice. Thus his magnanimity, generosity, clemency, and justice are beautiful promises of a happy and successful reign as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Like the great characters portrayed in fiction, in whose real existence the great creative romancers make us believe, the mighty emperor is not shelved but begins to carve his splendid career by an act of mercy and justice which appeals to our imagination.

Unlike the male characters of the drama, Doña Sol, in whom

we have the dramatic study of an almost perfect woman, does not suggest a striking antithesis in her characteristics. On the contrary her character is consistent, she being possessed of but one strong passion — love. Her individuality is carefully portrayed, though we are not given a detailed description of her features from the standpoint of material beauty. Judging from the few natural touches that are given and from the effects of her beauty upon her three suitors, we do not feel that she lacks any of those physical qualities or personal charms that belong to a woman of unusual grace and beauty. The young and handsome Doña Sol, whose father was a count and shed his blood in torrents for the king, is affianced to the old duke Ruy Gomez, her uncle, but she herself is in love with the young bandit Hernani, who visits her every evening in disguise. She is of noble birth, and is proud and jealous of her blood. In spite of her noble descent, however, she would rather live hungry, poor, and in exile with her Hernani, whom she calls her lion and her king, than be an empress with an emperor.

Several references are made to the magnetic effect of Doña Sol's soft, piercing black eyes, which are two mirrors, two rays, two torches, and which remind us of the exquisite raven black eyes of the dark lady of Shakespeare's sonnets. Hernani enjoys her songs and glances, and his soul wants to see itself in her eyes which shine like stars in the darkness. Flames from her eyes, whose flash is his joy, and whose smile is light, inundate his eyelids. Like Juliet, "she doth teach the torches to burn bright, and her eye discourses." Hernani might have said of her as Romeo said of Juliet,

Two of the fairest stars in all the heavens,  
Having some business, do entreat her eyes  
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.

Our heroine is kind and gentle; her soul is calm, pure, lofty, and beautiful; her brow is peaceful and pure; her step is graceful; she grows like a flower in the shadow; she weeps, blushes, and is ingenuous; she sings with tears in her black eyes, which become wet with the tears of rage; and she is an angel, a flower, a Venus, and a treasure of beauty which makes a king jealous. Hernani wishes to hear her celestial voice, for her word is a song



in which there is nothing human. Doña Sol's costume is white, the emblem of innocence and immaculate purity. She is inspired with lofty aspirations and has a longing desire for immortality.

Like Juliet, with whom she has much in common, Doña Sol is an eminently practical woman. She asks Hernani not to blame her strange audacity in proposing to follow him to the mountains, for where he goes she will go. She plans the clandestine meeting and the flight. Frustrated in her first plan, she again proposes flight. She insists on following him even to the scaffold. When confronted by Carlos, who is trying to drag her off, she snatches his dagger and threatens to kill him if he advances one step towards her. Although this is excellent storm-and-stress or melodramatic realism, yet we feel that she is made of heroic stuff. In the climax where she surrenders herself to Carlos rather than allow him to take the head of either Gomez or Hernani, she compels the wonder-struck king to exclaim that a man, in touching Doña Sol, becomes either an angel or a monster. While it is true she goes away with the young king as his hostage, at the same time she does not forget to carry her dagger concealed in her bosom. Finally, in the last balcony-scene she rises to the occasion, pleads earnestly for the life of her lover, yields to the inevitable, and dies bravely by the side of her lion of the mountains.

At the same time Doña Sol's practical turn of mind does not prevent her from being spiritual and poetical. She has longings of the "blue-flower" type. After the fashion of the Romantic characters of the time, she possesses a feeling for nature. This characteristic betrays the artifice of the author who is nothing if not lyrical, and yet there is evident in all his splendid lyrical passages a touch of the nature and realism of contemporary life. The best illustration of Doña Sol's appreciation of nature is found in the last balcony-scene where she and Hernani are alone after the noise of the wedding festivities has subsided. She is supremely happy and is weeping for joy. She asks Hernani to come and see the beautiful night. "While we sleep," says the enraptured woman, "nature half-waking lovingly watches over us. There is not a cloud in the sky. All like ourselves is at rest. Come, breath with me the air perfumed by the rose. No more

lights, no more noise. Silence reigns everywhere. Even while you were speaking just now the moon rose upon the horizon, its glimmering light and your voice both went to my heart." Presently, when the silence becomes too ominous and profound, she asks her lover if he would not like to see some star in the distance or hear some tender and sweet voice sing. She herself would hear the song of some bird in the fields or of a nightingale lost in the darkness, or the sound of some flute in the distance. "For music is sweet, it fills the soul with harmony, and like a divine chorus, it awakens a thousand voices which make melody in the heart." When suddenly she hears the fatal blast of Hernani's horn, she exclaims that her prayer is heard, and tells him how she likes to hear the sound of the horn in the depth of the woods. Another example of this enchanting poetry, whose melodious notes we can never forget, is found in the catastrophe, where Doña Sol, dying of poison, tenderly pleads with Hernani to be calm, for "We are going presently to expand our wings together towards new and brighter lights. With an even flight we are setting sail towards a better world."

While the other important characters of the drama are possessed of several passions, the sole passion of Doña Sol is love, her most striking and beautiful characteristic. It is genuine Romantic love, based on instinct. It is love that hopeth all things and endureth all things. Though Hernani is distrustful, jealous, and scornful, yet her love is strong enough to endure it all. It disdains all social barriers and makes her prefer the disinherited exile and wandering bandit to the powerful lord or emperor. Love is her sole existence. *Aimer, c'est vivre, c'est agir*. She loved Hernani out of pity, out of admiration, "for the dangers he had passed," for the mystery of his destiny, because she cannot help loving him, and yet, unlike Chimène, she does not know why she loves; she does not know

Where is fancy bred,  
Or in the heart or in the head.

Nor does she know why she must follow her lover: "Are you my demon or my angel? I do not know, but I am your slave, listen. Go where you will, I will go. Remain or depart, I am yours.

Why do I thus? I do not know." Doña Sol believes that her soul is bound to Hernani forever, and she looks upon him as a sort of god. Her love, exalted by spiritualism, and devoid of anything sensual, purifies her soul and brings happiness. Without Hernani, life would mean nothing to her, would be empty, hopeless. With him, she entertains lofty aspirations and sweet longings for immortality. For them, as for Romeo and Juliet, love is the arbiter of life and death. Together, full of love and hope and sensible of a moral victory, they spread their wings to a new and brighter world. Thus our heroine dies, a martyr to love.

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